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New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 18 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/344)

Draft resolutions (A/62/L.18, A/62/L.19, A/62/L.20 and A/62/L.21)

Mr. Ahamed (India): I thank you, Sir, for scheduling this discussion on an important subject that requires our collective attention to an extent that almost nothing else does — the question of Palestine, set in the larger context of the situation in the Middle East. This discussion is particularly appropriately timed, as it follows the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people yesterday and the international Conference hosted at Annapolis earlier this week.

India has traditionally followed with close concern the developments in that volatile region. Our delegation has perused with attention the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Middle East and on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. We have watched with concern as border restrictions, economic sanctions and a restrictive access regime have brought the Palestinian economy to the verge of collapse. We have viewed with alarm the continued vicious circle of attacks, reprisal and counterattacks, the worsening humanitarian and security situation in Gaza following developments in June this year, as well as the continued violence inflicted on innocent civilians.

Moreover, the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and the relentless construction of the separation wall threaten to create new facts on the ground and fresh grievances in an old conflict. The unresolved issues of last year's summer war in Lebanon and the long-pending question of the occupation of the Syrian Golan add to a sense of frustration and desperation. All those issues have the potential of exacting an immediate and long-term impact on the lives of the people, potentially contributing more fuel to an already combustible situation.

It is for that reason that India has consistently urged all concerned to eschew violence and exercise restraint on each of the all-too-frequent instances when violence has broken out, exacerbating suffering and misery in the region. It is in the interest of the entire international community that a comprehensive and peaceful solution to the problems besetting the Middle East be found at the earliest.

For India, commitment to the Palestinian cause has been a bedrock of its foreign policy since even before our independence. India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its attitude to the Palestinian question was inspired by its own freedom struggle, led by Mahatma Gandhi. In the early years of independent India, that policy was consolidated under the

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leadership of our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In November 1947, India voted against the partition of Palestine in the General Assembly. As early as 1975, India recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. In 1988, it recognized Palestinian statehood, and in 1996 India opened its Representative Office to the State of Palestine.

I had the singular honour of having had a most memorable meeting with the late President Yasser Arafat in September 2004 at Ramallah, at which I had the opportunity to express India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their cause. In fact, India's empathy with the Palestinian cause and its friendship with the people of Palestine constitute an integral and time-tested part of our foreign policy. I salute the indomitable spirit of the Palestinian people and reaffirm India's consistent, principled and unwavering support with their cause and their just struggle for a sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

It is widely recognized that the Middle East conflict is essentially political in nature, and therefore cannot be resolved by force. India has consistently called upon all parties in the region to fully cooperate with the efforts of the international community in that regard. We have supported the resumption of direct negotiations between the leaders of Palestine and Israel and the establishment, through peaceful negotiations, of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living side by side and in peace with the State of Israel. We have supported the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. We have also called for comprehensive peace and stability in the region and supported the early resumption of dialogue on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks. Those issues must be addressed equally in order to achieve comprehensive and durable peace in the region.

It is against that backdrop that India welcomes the Joint Understanding reached by the President of Palestine and the Prime Minister of Israel earlier this week at Annapolis. In particular, India welcomes the direct dialogue between the leaders of Palestine and Israel, and looks forward to an early and peaceful resolution of all issues between Israel and Palestine and their peoples. It is also satisfying that the Middle East peace process will address the remaining issues on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks. We believe that the Arab Peace Initiative, which was re-launched at the Arab Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in March this year, provides a constructive framework to achieve such a comprehensive peace. We hope that post-Annapolis developments will proceed down a path that will enable a negotiated solution of the core issues, leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living side by side and in peaceful co-existence with the State of Israel.

Given the complexity of that task, unprecedented determination, goodwill and capacity to offer and accept compromises and concessions are needed on all sides. It is in that regard that the members of the international community have a collective duty to help to create a favourable environment within which the principals can take the negotiations forward. India is ready to play a supportive role in that collective endeavour to achieve just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Salgueiro (Portugal): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries of Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The debate on the question of Palestine is taking place at a moment when hope for the peace process has been renewed by the historic results of the Annapolis Conference. The European Union commends the efforts of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and their firm commitment to the two-State solution as laid out in the road map and agreed between the parties, which is to result in an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. We congratulate them for the decision to immediately launch meaningful negotiations on all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception, as specified in previous agreements. The EU also welcomes the pledge made by the parties to reach an agreement before the end of 2008.

The Annapolis Conference represented a turning point for regional and international partners to effectively support a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In that context, the European

Union welcomes the initiative of President Bush and the wide and broad participation of key international actors.

The EU reaffirms its determination to support the efforts to reach comprehensive peace in the Middle East through a lasting and just settlement of the conflict based on the principle of land for peace, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and previous agreements reached between the parties.

In order to consolidate the progress achieved thus far and to fulfil the potential of the current process, it will be of the utmost importance that the parties take additional steps to meet previous commitments, including the commitments under the road map and the Agreement on Movement and Access, and that they desist from any actions that threaten the viability of a just and lasting settlement, in conformity with international law.

As the parties stressed in the Joint Understanding adopted at Annapolis, stopping all acts of violence and terror is of the utmost importance. The European Union strongly condemns the firing of rockets by Palestinian militias into Israeli territory. While recognizing Israel's right to self-defence, the EU calls on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint, and underlines that action should not be disproportionate or in contradiction with international law.

We reiterate our call for the immediate release of the abducted Israeli soldier and commend efforts, including by partners in the region, to that effect. We also repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian legislators detained in Israel.

The European Union reiterates its full commitment, in agreement with our partners in the Quartet, to continue to support the parties in their efforts towards peace and a two-State solution by making a wide-ranging contribution that includes support for developing the Palestinian security sector through the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories. The European Union is also committed to strengthening its ongoing activities in support of the economic and financial development of the future Palestinian State through the continuation of assistance and in close cooperation with the Quartet's Representative. In that regard, we emphasize the importance of the Paris donor's conference, which represents an essential complement to the political process launched in Annapolis.

Mr. Saltanov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): For decades now, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been a source of constant tension that has brought suffering and deprivation to innocent people and has been a dangerously destabilizing factor in the international situation. The efforts undertaken for a settlement have occasionally produced hopes that peace would be established in the region, only to then lurch backwards and cause great disappointment. That is particularly true of the attempts to resolve the key problem, which is the Palestinian issue. After the Oslo agreements, it has been impossible to make any kind of progress on that aspect. Furthermore, since 2000, Palestinian and Israeli relations have been marked by bloodshed, terror and very severe reprisals.

On 26 and 27 November 2007, an important event took place that reopened the prospects for the re-establishment of the Middle East peace process. The international Conference held in Annapolis gave a powerful impulse to the renewal of the Palestinian-Israeli talks. In all likelihood, we will be able to put an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories that started in 1967 and fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to create their own independent and viable State, laying the foundation for coexistence between that State and Israel in peace, good neighbourliness and security.

That event was the result of the courageous decision taken by the Government of Israel, headed by Mr. Olmert, and the Palestine National Administration, headed by their acknowledged leader, President Mahmoud Abbas, to start talks. It took place thanks to collective international support, first and foremost by the Middle East Quartet mediators. The energetic contribution by the United States played a particularly important part.

The Russian Federation has, for more than a decade now, favoured resolving the Palestinian problem on the basis of coexistence between the two States. It is precisely for that reason that we, as a member of the Quartet and in our national capacity, have done everything possible to promote the success of the Conference, having held over the last two months intensive contacts with the parties directly concerned and with those who have the potential for influence in the region.

The road to Annapolis was not a simple one. It is quite clear, however, that talks have begun and key matters will be taken up, including the settlement of the refugee question, Jerusalem, borders, water resources and other very sensitive problems rife with many difficulties. A search for compromise will be necessary, as will responsible steps by both parties to achieve agreements that will decide the future of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and the entire Middle East.

We believe that it will be possible to reach an agreement if we strictly abide by the established international legal basis. That means that confidence-building measures must also be implemented to ensure the success of those talks. First and foremost, we are talking about the implementation of the obligations that are from the first phase of the road map. Israel's anxiety regarding security should be allayed, as should that of the Palestinians regarding settlements, freedom of movement, Palestinian prisoners and other issues.

An important element for the successful conclusion of the dialogue within the agreed time frame — that is, during 2008 — will be the follow-up mechanism, including the convening of new international meetings. The ministerial meeting of donors in Paris, which has been planned for December 2007, will agree on a set of measures aimed at the creation and consolidation of the Palestinian State.

The Russian proposal to organize a meeting in Moscow on the Middle East settlement is also on the table and has received broad support. We intend, at the forthcoming ministerial meeting of the Quartet and in contact with interested parties, to continue the discussion of the possible agenda and time frame for that event. It is also clear that, in the interests of a phased movement towards a full-fledged Palestinian State, we must overcome the dividing up of the Palestinian territories and restore the unity of the Palestinians.

It is perfectly clear to all of us that a genuine peace in the Middle East must be a comprehensive peace. The appeals to renew efforts towards such a peace were clearly heard at the recent Conference. In that connection, it is extremely important that the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon participate in its work — something that the Russian Federation has actively promoted. Indeed, stabilization in the region cannot be guaranteed until the question of the Golan Heights has been resolved and the settlement of other questions regarding relations between Israel, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon has started. On the other hand, starting a dialogue on those problems will give full force to that process and sustainability to the peace process, including on the Israel-Palestine track. The Russian Federation favours proceeding to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement on all tracks, including the Syrian, Lebanese and multilateral tracks.

The preparation for and convening of a comprehensive international conference would make it possible for practical efforts to be made. There is a well-tried mechanism for the implementation of such work: the collective actions of the Quartet and their interaction with Israel, the League of Arab States and other members of the international community.

Finally and most importantly, there is a sound international legal basis for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement: the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, including the parameters for the normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab States. The Russian Federation will continue to actively promote the renewal and progress towards a stable and sound peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Beck (Palau), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Nguyen Tat Thanh (Viet Nam): I have the privilege to deliver this statement on behalf of His Excellency, Ambassador Le Luong Minh, Permanent Representative of Viet Nam, who is currently engaged in another important meeting.

> "It is a great honour for me to speak in this forum on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Allow me, at the outset, to convey to the Government and people of Palestine our most heart-felt congratulations. I sincerely thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Paul Badji, for their detailed and comprehensive reports.
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> "My delegation associates itself with the statement made earlier by Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.
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> "Sixty years after the General Assembly passed resolution 181 (II) on the partition plan and 40 years after the Security Council adopted

resolution 242 (1967) on the Arab-Israeli conflict, peace in the Middle East remains elusive and the people of Palestine are still stateless. The plight of the Palestinian people worsens with every passing day through the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic, social, political and security situation, which is due to the recent excessive and indiscriminate use of force in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. We are especially concerned by the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, we are concerned by the attacks that target Israeli civilians, killing innocent people and undermining the peace process.

"At the opening of the 2007 session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People earlier this year, the Secretary-General reminded delegates that neither the Palestinian people nor the Israeli people can achieve their respective legitimate demands of freedom, dignity and long-term security without a settlement of the Palestine-Israel conflict. He went on to call for efforts this year to reverse the trends of 2006, in which, he rightly pointed out, nearly all developments took us further from the goal shared by a majority of Israelis and Palestinians, namely, two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

"In this connection, realizing the urgent need for an immediate resumption of direct and substantive negotiations between all parties concerned for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution based on the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, on the agreements entered into by the concerned parties and on the land-for-peace principle, we hail the recent efforts by the Quartet. We especially welcome the holding by the United States of the Annapolis Conference on 27 November, aimed at resuming dialogue between Israel and Palestine.

"The convening of that Conference and the participation of more than 40 countries, among them many Arab countries, whose role is indispensable in any solution for the Middle East issue is a praiseworthy development. We continue to support the Arab Peace Initiative put forth at the 14th Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002. My country welcomes the intentions of France and Russia to hold similar events in support of the anticipated negotiations among the concerned parties.

"Deeply encouraged by the Joint Understanding agreed on by the Israeli and Palestinian leaders at the Annapolis Conference, reflecting their determination to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008, we urge both sides to build on that momentum to move the Middle East peace process forward. While welcoming the recent announcement by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel on the scheduling of a freeze on the construction of new settlements in the occupied West Bank and the release of Palestinian prisoners, we call upon Israel to put an immediate end to all military operations and incursions into the Palestinian territories and to its ongoing efforts to complete the construction of the separation wall on Palestinian land. This would create a favourable atmosphere for the resumption of peace talks and final status negotiations on a two-State solution.

"Only through a negotiated solution that takes into account the legitimate rights of all parties concerned can the Middle East question, with the Israel-Palestine conflict at its core, be satisfactorily addressed and ultimately resolved. Viet Nam looks forward to continuing to contribute to the efforts of the international community towards this end.

"Finally, I wish to reiterate Viet Nam's consistent position in support of the establishment of a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, where, at long last, Palestinians can live in peace, independence, freedom and dignity."

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, and on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to reiterate our solidarity with the people of Palestine in their tireless efforts and unwavering determination to pursue their national aspirations and in their courageous struggle to defend their inalienable rights.

The recent United Nations reports on the question of Palestine, particularly the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the report of the Special

Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories yet again bear witness to the unfortunate reality that, in the past 12 months, the Zionist regime has continued its crimes against the defenceless Palestinian people, and has been "systematically altering the Palestinian land through unlawful policies and practices, including settlement construction and, more recently, the construction of the wall in the West Bank" (*A/62/35, para. 17*).

As the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People indicates, the Israeli regime has, throughout the period under review, continued its criminal practices against Palestinians through unlawful measures such as extrajudicial killings, house demolitions, unlawful detention of Palestinian authorities, humiliating systems of checkpoints, expanding illegal settlements, construction of the unlawful wall in contravention of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, periodic closures, the sealing off of the Gaza Strip, as well as the destruction of Palestinian civilian infrastructure and agricultural lands. These actions have resulted in unspeakable sufferings and losses for the Palestinian people, including the death and injury of hundreds of Palestinians, and have caused an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Palestinian society.

In addition, the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories highlights other shocking aspects of the Israeli regime's policies and practices in violation of the most basic principles of international law and human rights in the Palestinian territories. What happened in Beit Hanoun is a clear example of Israeli brutality against the Palestinians in the period under review. According to the report,

> "Beit Hanoun ... was subjected to particularly vicious military action ... 82 Palestinians, at least half of whom were civilians (including 21 children), were killed ... More than 260 people, including 60 children, were injured and hundreds of males between the ages of 16 and 40 were arrested. Forty thousand residents were confined to their homes as a result of a curfew as Israeli tanks and bulldozers rampaged through their town, destroying 279 homes, an 850-year-old mosque, public buildings, electricity networks, schools and hospitals, levelling orchards and digging up roads, water mains and sewage networks" (*A/HRC/4/17, para. 10*).

Moreover, according to the aforementioned United Nations reports, poverty and unemployment in the occupied Palestinian territories have reached their highest level. Health and education have been undermined, and the entire social fabric of society is threatened.

The continuation of Israel's unlawful policies and practices in the occupied Syrian Golan not only is a source of tension in the region, but is also a matter of grave concern for the international community. The Israeli regime has made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of the area by establishing new settlements and imposing their laws on Syrian citizens in contravention of all relevant United Nations resolutions.

Furthermore, the said regime's constant and continuous threats against Lebanon, as well as its occupation of Lebanese lands and daily violations of Lebanese airspace and harassment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), are a clear infringement of resolution 1701 (2006). On many occasions, and as recently as 6 November 2007, the United Nations has protested the daily air violations of Lebanese airspace, and has called on Israelis to stop these operations, which are violating Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and increasing tensions in the area. As in the past, the response of the Israeli regime to these calls has been complete defiance and contempt.

Undoubtedly, the unqualified support extended to the Israeli regime by a permanent member of the Security Council has served to embolden it to continue with its crimes against the defenceless Palestinians and other peoples in the region, and has made it more brazen in adamantly violating and defying a host of Security Council resolutions, as well as the resolutions of other United Nations organs.

It is evident that the settlement of the Palestinian issue is imperative and indispensable for the attainment of a comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. Peace in the region cannot be achieved through aggression, State terrorism, intimidation and occupation. Nor can it be attained through so-called initiatives or conferences that pursue other politically motivated goals rather than realizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We

believe that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region will remain elusive until all the rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland and the establishment of a Palestinian State, are fully and unconditionally restored. Solutions to the Palestinian crisis will come about through genuine actions on the ground in Palestine and by the Palestinians themselves. Only through national unity and collective action can the Palestinians attain their long-awaited aspirations and goals.

In view of past experiences, the international community and the people of the region cannot be misled by politically motivated moves, such as the recent meeting in Annapolis, which are intended to accord legitimacy to the forces of occupation and aggression. In the past few days, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the occupied territories have expressed their dismay and anguish at such moves.

Undoubtedly, as has been repeatedly stressed by the officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a durable peace in Palestine and the Middle East will only be possible through justice, the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, an end to discrimination, an end to occupation, the return of all Palestinian refugees and a democratic mechanism through which all inhabitants of Palestine, as well as Palestinians driven out of their homeland, would have the possibility to determine their future in a democratic and peaceful fashion.

Before concluding, I wish to take this opportunity to place on record that my delegation rejects the baseless allegations and distortions raised against my country in the Assembly yesterday by the representative of the Israeli regime. The said regime poses the sole and most serious and urgent threat facing the world and region today. It should be urgently and decisively countered by the international community. Who is unaware that this regime has brought nothing but terror, bloodshed, aggression, occupation and misery for the region and for the world? The reports currently before the Assembly and numerous others will testify to this reality.

Finally, I would like to extend our appreciation to the President for having convened this meeting, and to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their tireless efforts to address the torment and onerous circumstances of the people of Palestine, as well as for their informative reports in this regard.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement made by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

On behalf of my delegation, it gives me great pleasure to thank His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the members of the Committee for their strong and vital efforts to support the just Palestinian cause and to uncover the facts about Israeli practices.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Government and the People of the United Arab Emirates reaffirm their continued support for and solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people in their just struggle to realize their legitimate aspirations to establish their independent State, like all other peoples of the world.

This year's deliberations acquire special importance due to the very critical developments relating to the Palestinian question, which are reflected in the seriously deteriorating humanitarian, security and political conditions of the Palestinian people inside and outside the occupied territories on the one hand, and in the Annapolis peace Conference on the other. The United Arab Emirates has participated in good faith with other Arab countries in that Conference with a view to undertaking practical, concrete and effective steps to break the current impasse in the peace process in the Middle East. The essence of the peace process has been and remains bringing Israel to full compliance with international legitimacy that requires it to end its illegal and illegitimate occupation of all Arab and Palestinian territories by withdrawal to the June 1967 borders.

We in the United Arab Emirates have repeatedly expressed our total rejection of Israeli expansion activities in the region and their illegal implications, which are manifested in the confiscation of Arab and Palestinian territories and their natural resources. That represents a grave breach of the provisions of international law and humanitarian international law,

which can no longer be ignored by the international community.

The United Arab Emirates expresses its grave concern over the continued Israeli aggression revealed in the recent reports of the Secretary-General, which graphically illustrate the effects of the unjustified and illegal construction of the separation wall and the building of more settlements inside the Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan, as well as the collective punitive measures taken daily against Palestinians, including repeated Israeli incursions and aggressions in a number of Palestinian cities and villages; extrajudicial killings, excessive violence and the arbitrary arrest of thousands of civilians, including women and children; the large-scale demolition of Palestinian homes and of social and economic structures; and the imposition of strict restrictions on the movement of persons and goods. All those actions have resulted in the total isolation of Gaza and its population and their deprivation of food aid and primary commodities essential for survival, including energy.

My country considers the Annapolis Conference, hosted by the United States on 27 November and attended by parties involved in the Arab-Israeli peace process, to be a positive step in the right direction towards bringing the Arab-Israeli peace process back on track, which calls for further effective efforts at the regional and international levels. Such efforts should be made either through the mechanism announced at the Annapolis Conference under the supervision of the United States, or within the United Nations system and the Security Council, in particular under the mandate conferred upon it by the Charter, and in the framework of the Quartet through a fair and neutral approach so as to ensure that the political momentum generated at the Annapolis Conference towards advancing the direct, effective and comprehensive negotiations on all Arab-Israeli tracks is sustained. Efforts should also be made pursuant to the provisions of the resolutions of international legality, the road map, and the Arab peace initiative in order to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli struggle in the Middle East.

In that context, we call for the following necessary steps to be taken.

First, Israel, the occupying Power must, on an urgent priority basis, undertake fully to cease its aggressive policies against the Palestinians, release the prisoners detained in the thousands, and end its raids and siege of Gaza. Israel must also desist from obstructing access to emergency humanitarian assistance as a result of its illegal practices, which are in violation of international humanitarian law in letter and spirit and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War. In that context, we also expect the international community to work, within the framework of the Paris donors' conference scheduled for 17 December, on doubling its financial and development assistance to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate their current plight and enable the Palestinian Authority to rebuild and reform its national institutions.

Secondly, Israel must take full and immediate measures, under international supervision, to cease all settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem; to remove the existing settlements and the separation wall from the West Bank and the areas surrounding Al-Quds; and to compensate those affected by the wall in accordance with its obligations under the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the advisory opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice in that regard. We also urge the international community to compel Israel immediately and speedily to halt all illegal actions in East Jerusalem affecting Muslim and Christian shrines.

Thirdly, in the context of its confidence-building measures, Israel must implement a full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal from all Palestinian cities and villages of the West Bank reoccupied on 28 September 2000, and demonstrate its serious and unconditional compliance with international legal resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) during its negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on all the final status issues in order to ensure, within a specific time frame, the elimination of all settlements; the achievement of a just settlement for the Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III); a resolution to the dispute over Jerusalem; and a definitive demarcation of the borders between the Israeli and Palestinian States based on the road map and the Arab peace initiative, which calls for Israel's total and unconditional withdrawal from all Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including

Al-Quds Al-Sharif. That will reflect Israel's serious intention to seek a true peace in the region and to establish an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side in peace and security.

Fourthly, we call on Israel immediately to enter, without conditions, into sincere and serious negotiations with the Syrian Government with a view to reaching a just and lasting peace agreement that ensures the return of the Golan Heights to Syria.

Fifthly, we call on Israel to withdraw from the Lebanese Shab'a farms and Al-Ghajar village and to stop violating Lebanese airspace and land. Israel must also demonstrate its genuine and sincere intentions and cooperation in providing the required information on the mines and cluster explosives planted before its withdrawal from South Lebanon, in accordance with its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions and in order to bring peace and stability to Lebanon.

In conclusion, we hope that Israel has finally realized that its existence as a secure country that maintains normal and cooperative economic relations with States in the region requires it to modify its hostile stance towards the Palestinian People and neighbouring countries and to fulfil, on a non-selective basis, the demands of a true peace, which cannot be achieved without its full and unconditional withdrawal from all Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in order to establish an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living in mutual peace and security with its neighbours in the region.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting here to express our solidarity with the Palestinian people. We recognize that this occasion is of special significance this year in that it coincides with the launching of a new international quest for a solution to a struggle that dates back many decades and to an ever-deteriorating tragedy that is akin to an infected wound which all understand represents a threat to the security and stability of the Middle East and the entire world.

It is not enough to seek a solution merely by renewing international efforts after a long period of dormancy. Rather, what is required is that the world be ready to learn the lessons from the peace process that stumbled after it was launched in Madrid as well as understand that the situation which we are in today has resulted from a lack of a clear vision and from the loss of a resolute will to put an end to the last occupation in the world.

Lebanon went to the Annapolis Conference on the basis of an Arab consensus on the Arab Peace Initiative and in support of the national rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish a viable and sovereign independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. In this regard, we would like to reaffirm that marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is important because of what they have been suffering for the last 40 years, since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and because of the passage of 60 years since the beginning of the refugee tragedy.

We believe that this is a warning for the conscience of the world that the time has come to find a just solution to this conflict and to making it a priority. The realities of the occupation alone are unequivocal proof of the need to put an end to the struggle on the basis of enabling the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination in their independent State.

The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has almost been swallowed whole by settlements. Settlement activity has continued since 1967 and has not been deterred by any laws or international resolutions, negotiations, or even agreements. Today, there are more than 149 settlements that have dismembered the West Bank, transformed it into isolated cantons and separated East Jerusalem from its surroundings.

It is enough to point out here that these settlements and the lands attached to them, as well as the advanced settler outposts and Israeli military bases and their attached roads, occupy 38 per cent of the area of the West Bank. Furthermore, they are inhabited by 450,000 Israeli settlers while 2.4 million Palestinians live in very harsh conditions on what remains of the land.

This settlement expansion is also achieved at the expense of Palestinian land and water resources. Is there a need to explain the meaning of providing Israeli settlers four or five times as much water as Palestinian landowners? Is there any other way to describe this reality than to say that it is part of an abominable, hideous apartheid policy that should no longer exist?

This settlement expansion is conducted at the expense of the social and economic fabric of Palestinian society and at expense of Palestinians' freedom of movement in their already occupied land.

Is there any need to explain the meaning of constructing a separation barrier that goes through the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and whose length extends 525 kilometres and, once completed, will extend more than 731 kilometres, ultimately taking an additional 10.2 per cent of the land of the West Bank? The wall is made from hard cement blocks and electrified wires that break Jerusalem into sections and separate farmers from their land and trap families between the wall and the Green Line.

We would like to recall here that the construction of the wall did not stop for a single day even after the International Court of Justice, in its 2004 advisory opinion, stated that it was illegal and that it created a situation on the ground that was the equivalent of a de facto annexation. Additionally, the advisory opinion declared it Israel's duty to stop constructing the wall, to remove the segments already built and to compensate the Palestinians harmed by the construction. Moreover, the occupation has established almost 85 checkpoints and 572 roadblocks which alone have transformed the daily lives of Palestinians into a living hell.

My presentation seems long but it is a part of the continuing tragedy in the West Bank.

As for the Gaza Strip, life there has become almost impossible with the imposition of collective punishment on the pretext of combating terrorism and terrorists. Is it not enough that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has said that it is no longer able to provide more than 61 per cent of the daily caloric requirements for about 1.2 million residents of the Gaza Strip who rely for their nutrition on United Nations aid? Is it not enough to witness the collapse of the educational system, as demonstrated by the unprecedentedly high rate of failure in basic education?

We are not presenting the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation for the sake of painting a picture. Rather, we hope that the world will see these harsh realities and learn from them in order to push forward the renewed efforts for peace. The Palestinian reality can no longer stand any more promises or delayed dates. Only practical and tangible measures are a true measure of any serious efforts to find a solution. Such efforts can be materialized through an immediate end to all forms of settlements, regardless of what they are called, the removal of checkpoints and roadblocks, the reopening of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem as well as a halt to the construction of the separation wall. Limited and expanded military operations in the Palestinian territories must also be stopped. Prisoners, who number over 10,000 — among them children and mothers with their own children — must be released.

If the aim is to truly reach a final solution, then we cannot ignore the fact that the refugee problem has always been the main issue. Today, there are more than 4.4 million refugees living in limbo. Most of these refugees come from families that were displaced in 1948 because of the terrorist operations and organized massacres. It is enough to mention the Deir Yassin massacre to make the hairs on the back of our neck stand up. When the military attacks stopped, Israel prevented those who fled from returning to their homes. It even confiscated their property, taking the view that those people were absent. Israel destroyed hundreds of villages, believing that this destruction would annihilate the history and the rights of their inhabitants.

Here, my country, Lebanon, would like to affirm the need to resolve the refugee issue, based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and its flat rejection of having the refugees resettle on Lebanese land, because such resettlement would threaten the Lebanese national fabric and entity, just as it would threaten the national identity of Palestinian refugees.

No peace or stability is possible without a comprehensive solution that would include an Israeli withdrawal from all Arab lands occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan, the Shab'a farms, and the Kfar Shouba Hills, as well as the occupied parts of al-Ghajar village in Lebanon and the release of Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails.

Today, we do not want a new peace process that would lead us through another maze of procrastination and delays. Rather, what we need are practical measures that would finally lead to a just and comprehensive peace.

Mr. Abdul Azeez (Sri Lanka): My delegation would like to express its deep appreciation to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal, and the other members of the Committee for their efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We would also like to thank the Committee for its report presented to us (A/62/35).

The position of the Government of Sri Lanka on the question of Palestine has remained unchanged over the years. That was reaffirmed by His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, in his message issued on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which I wish to quote.

> "On the solemn occasion to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, on behalf of my Government and the people of Sri Lanka, I take this opportunity to reiterate our unequivocal and sincere support for the people and the Government of Palestine for their just struggle to achieve their inalienable rights, including the right to statehood. Over the last four decades, Palestinian people have been undergoing immense hardships and deprivation of their legitimate rights, with no end in sight. We share the aspirations of many thousands of Palestinian people living in occupied territories. I have closely associated myself with the cause of the Palestinian people over the last 30 years. It is my sincere hope and belief that the continuing efforts by the international community, including the ongoing efforts by the Quartet and other individual member countries, will pave the way towards a permanent and negotiated settlement to the question of Palestine, leading to an independent and democratic State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security."

The illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory remains the main issue of the question of Palestine. The occupation has continued far too long, and its consequences have brought immeasurable hardships to the Palestinian people, caused disruption to their living conditions and resulted in the destruction of homes and infrastructure in the occupied territory.

During the period under review, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has continued to deteriorate due to Israeli military activities and the restrictions imposed by it on the Palestinian people affecting every aspect of their lives. The escalation of violence on both sides has contributed to the further deterioration of the situation. We are concerned that the continuation of Israeli settlement activities and the building of a wall in the occupied territories pose a grave threat to the prospects for a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people must be respected, and a solution to the question of Palestine should be achieved on the basis of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territory, respect for the right of all to live in peace and security and the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are among the essential principles for a lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Sri Lanka wishes to reiterate its strong support to the Palestinian people and their leadership in their efforts towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine. In that regard, the unity of the Palestinian people is a prerequisite for the achievement of a durable solution. We hope that all factions of the Palestinian leadership will unite in support of President Mahmoud Abbas and his Government.

We would also like to express our support for the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and for the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of President Abbas. It is important that the national and democratic institutions of the Palestinian Authority are maintained and protected, as they will constitute the vital foundation of the future independent Palestinian State.

It is encouraging to note the ongoing efforts to revive the peace process. The leaders of Israel and Palestine agreed at Annapolis to work together to arrive at a final solution before the end of 2008. Sri Lanka welcomes that development and would like to compliment the two leaders for their renewed commitment to pursuit of peace. We hope that those efforts will lead to the end of the occupation and to a final agreement for both Palestinian and Israelis to live side by side within secure and recognized boundaries.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to associate myself with the

statements delivered by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I would also like to express my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his comprehensive and valuable report (A/62/344).

On this, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the pleasure to extend my profound thanks to the President of the Assembly for his interest in the question of Palestine. I also wish to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairperson, Mr. Paul Badji, the Permanent Representative of the brotherly Republic of Senegal, as well all the other members of the Committee's Bureau, for their extensive efforts to ensure that the Palestinian people enjoy their full rights, and to mobilize international support for their legitimate demands.

As the Assembly is aware, 60 years since the adoption of the historic 1947 resolution intended to divide Palestine into Palestinian and Israeli States, the Palestinian people continue to live under the yoke of occupation and to be deprived of all their legitimate rights, including the rights to self-determination and to establish their own independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. It is the duty of the international community to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people by convincing the State of Israel of the need to implement relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, as military confrontation, the use of force and the imposition of fait accompli policies are all rejected by every international norm and have led the two parties to stalemate. The only hope lies in adopting the language of dialogue and understanding instead of that of violence and war.

The recent holding of the Annapolis Conference, which resulted in renewed determination by the parties concerned to resume dialogue, provides a glimmer of hope of reaching a just and permanent solution to this long-standing conflict. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, which welcomes the preliminary results of the Conference and the hope it has engendered following a long stalemate, calls upon all parties to honour the timetable established at the Conference and to work to build confidence through dialogue and understanding.

My country, which took part in the deliberations of the Conference, in accordance with its strong commitment to support its Palestinian brothers, appreciates the important role played by the United States of America to convene the Conference, as well as its pledge to continue to pursue negotiations under its auspices. In that regard, we welcome the political will expressed both by Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, and Mr. Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel, as well as the Joint Understanding they endorsed in the presence of American President George Bush and of more than 40 countries and organizations. We hope that the Conference will in fact relaunch the search for a just and lasting solution that leads to the establishment, before the end of 2008, of the Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania will spare no effort to achieve that goal, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and resolutions of international legitimacy, in defence of justice and truth and the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr. Li Junhua (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Once again, the Middle East is standing at a critical crossroads, where a rare window of opportunity has opened up. At the just concluded Annapolis Conference, President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared a Joint Understanding in which both leaders expressed their determination to immediately launch negotiations to resolve all core issues, with a view to concluding a peace treaty before the end of 2008. Representatives from over 40 countries and international organizations witnessed that historic moment. China welcomes the political resolve for peace, as demonstrated by the leaders of Palestine and Israel alike, and appreciates the efforts of all the parties concerned, especially the host, that contributed to the success of the Conference.

The success of the Annapolis Conference has given rise to new hopes for the revival of the Middle East peace process after years of stagnation. The broad consensus and strong aspirations of the international community — to build an independent Palestinian State and to enable the two States, Palestine and Israel, and the two peoples, Arab and Jewish, to live side by side in peace — have been confirmed by the Conference. There is no viable way to achieve that goal other than to negotiate on the basis of the relevant

resolutions of the United Nations, the Quartet road map and the Arab peace initiative.

The Annapolis Conference is a good beginning, sending out an encouraging signal. We have reason to be optimistic, but the forthcoming negotiations will prove to be daunting. Peace may remain elusive should the opportunity fail to be seized. We have to remain sober and never underestimate the challenges and difficulties ahead.

With the support of the international community, the Palestinian and Israeli sides should seize the opportunity, negotiate in good faith, and work out an early agreement on all issues concerning final status. Both sides should work to create an atmosphere conducive to negotiation, including by maintaining the goodwill and confidence-building measures that were taken recently. Both sides should implement in earnest their respective obligations under the first phase of the Quartet road map and consolidate broader internal consensus. We believe that Israel should further respond to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, including by facilitating the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The international community has an important role to play and should stand ready to assist in whatever manner might be helpful. The international community, including the United Nations, should provide steadfast political support for the negotiations between Israel and Palestine. Meanwhile, it is appropriate to consider inclusive, balanced and effective multilateral mechanisms for facilitation, monitoring and implementation so as to provide guarantees for peace.

A united, independent and prosperous Palestinian State would be a solid foundation for the security of the entire Middle East. The international community should increase its humanitarian and development aid to the Palestinian people with a view to accelerating institution-building, economic development and social rehabilitation in Palestine. Meanwhile, conditions should be created to promote regional trade and communications so that all peoples in the region may truly enjoy the fruits of exchange and cooperation.

While the Palestinian question lies at the core of the Middle East question, negotiations between Israel and both Syria and Lebanon constitute equally important and integral parts of the Middle East peace process. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution will depend on the settlement of all issues of concern in the Middle East. Restarting the negotiations between Israel and Syria or Lebanon in due time and achieving progress on either track will contribute to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and may even mutually reinforce the negotiation process between Palestine and Israel.

It is alarming to note that the tension in Lebanon has remained unabated over the past year, plunging the country into an endless cycle of political crises. With disputes on the presidential election evolving, we hope that all parties in Lebanon will stay calm and settle their differences by seeking common ground through political consultation. Meanwhile, we hope that Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) will continue to be implemented in a comprehensive and balanced manner.

Sixty years ago yesterday, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) on the partition of Palestine. A week ago, we commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Often referred to as a land of milk and honey, Palestine has instead had too much bloodshed and tears. All parties have a high stake in the Middle East peace process; any stagnation, setback or frustration of the process can carry with it enormous risks and great costs. No matter how difficult they may be, all attempts to achieve peace should be encouraged. It is the joint responsibility of the international community to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East at an early date.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly's consideration of agenda item 18 on the question of Palestine is a new opportunity for my delegation to express its unswerving support for the Palestinian cause and its ongoing solidarity with the Palestinian people. It is in that spirit that we have quite naturally participated, side by side with our Palestinian brothers, in the celebration on 29 November every year of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

We associate ourselves with the statements made by the representatives of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

This solemn celebration transcends the accepted meaning of the word because it recalls, on the one

hand, the commitment and unshakable resolve of the Palestinian people to live free and in peace, and on the other, the manner in which the international community has failed to act consistently, boldly and authoritatively to end a conflict that has dragged out endlessly. Someone has said that "in remembrance there is hope", and that, in our opinion, clearly reflects the way we perceive this day of commemoration. It is quite true that the past sheds a pitiless light on the present and, undoubtedly, on the future.

We are also deeply convinced that the history of the Palestinian people will remain incomprehensible to anyone who does not recall the original wound and the historic injustice inflicted by the act that deprived it of its land and its own identity. That wound, which we imagined to have been healed by the passing years, is reopened every time an opportunity is missed or some formula or initiative fails because of a lack of boldness or clarity of vision. As a direct consequence of those circumstances, the Palestinian people, disheartened and disillusioned by decades of misleadingly reassuring statements and broken promises, wants something tangible to happen.

A hope was born in Annapolis, led by the political will of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, who publicly and solemnly committed themselves to pursuing dialogue in order to finalize by late 2008 the terms of a comprehensive peace agreement that would enshrine the lasting and just settlement of all pending questions and lead to the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

At this critical moment, we are convinced that the international community has the moral duty to help the parties to translate that new resolve to resume dialogue into a genuine dynamic of peace that will be fed by tangible progress on so-called final status issues. That resolve will also have to be mobilized around the vision articulated by the Security Council in its relevant resolutions, to which the Arab peace initiative and the Quartet's road map have leant operational content and a clear political horizon. The definitive goal of such a vision must inevitably be the creation of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

That is clearly no easy task, but underlying its apparent complexity, the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security is not impossible to achieve. If that vision is to become concrete reality, the full cooperation of the parties to the conflict throughout the process will be of capital importance, for they will have to address all substantive questions with the necessary political will.

Faithful to its attachment to just causes throughout the world, Algeria supports the peace process and its ultimate goal of accelerating the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, with all Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. That solidarity is inseparable from our history and our unwavering support for the rights of peoples to self-determination and the struggle for freedom. In the specific case of Palestine, our long-term vision is based on the multiplying effect that a final settlement of this question could have. It would be the driving force behind a momentum for peace, spreading its benefits throughout the region.

Any prospect other than that of a lasting and just peace in this tormented region can only worsen hotspots of tension and fuel the frustration in Arab and Muslim public opinion, thus deepening misunderstanding and contributing to intolerance and extremism of all kinds.

The implementation of confidence-building measures — particularly with regard to freezing settlements, freeing Palestinian prisoners and lifting the drastic restrictions imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, on the movement of goods and persons within the Palestinian territories and between them and the rest of the world — would undoubtedly be a token of goodwill. The recently concluded Annapolis Conference underlined the urgent need for such measures and their fundamental importance with a view to making progress towards a just and lasting agreement.

In addition to those agreed aspects, what we continue to need most is a visionary, magnanimous and imaginative approach that respects international legality and is based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions, while opening new avenues and creating new hopes.

Mr. Mohamad (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of my delegation, I should like to join preceding speakers in thanking Ambassador Kerim for his skilful leadership of the work of the General Assembly at the present session. We also wish to associate ourselves with the statements made by the Permanent

Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

My delegation takes note with great interest the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35). We sincerely thank Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee, and the other Committee members for their efforts in preparing that comprehensive report, which describes events that have taken place in the occupied Palestinian territory. We hope that their efforts will continue to raise awareness of the international community by sounding the alarm about the gravity of the situation, so that greater endeavours will be made to achieve justice and legitimacy for the Palestinian people and to help them establish an independent State of their own. We have also read the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/344), the contents of which do not differ from those of the Committee's report.

Here, we should also like to express our appreciation to United Nations humanitarian workers in the occupied Palestinian territories, some of whom have sacrificed their lives as they worked to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. In particular, we wish to thank the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and all those who work with it.

My country is following with great concern the developments in the Palestinian territories described in the reports of the Secretary-General and of the Committee. We also wish to express our alarm at the scenes broadcast daily by the news media depicting the horrendous nature of the Israeli occupation. Israel, the occupying Power, is carrying out its policy of occupation and settlement expansion at an even swifter pace than in recent years, ignoring all relevant United Nations resolutions, including, inter alia, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

In addition to expanding its settlements at the expense of Palestinian villages and lands, Israel has continued its military operations in the West Bank, claiming hundreds of civilians, including women and children, as its victims. It has also destroyed infrastructure and prevented patients from reaching hospitals. It has even prevented humanitarian and relief workers from reaching those in need.

With regard to the separation wall, Israel has ignored the General Assembly's adoption of resolution ES-10/17 on that subject at its tenth emergency special session and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the illegality of that barbaric measure, continuing in its belligerent construction of the wall, to the detriment of Palestinian villages and agricultural lands. And one can only imagine the conditions of the thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

In the Gaza Strip, the Israeli authorities have carried out repeated military strikes against villages, killing dozens of Palestinians, most of them women and children. Israel has also imposed a tight siege on the Gaza Strip, has closed all crossing points and has adopted a policy of assassination. If anyone can invoke the right to self-defence, it is the Palestinian people and their posterity.

Israel's refusal to release Palestinian tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Government has increased the budget deficit and thus worsened the economic situation. The Palestinian Government's financial commitments have accumulated, including its commitment to pay salaries and to provide basic services to the people. All of this is being witnessed by the international community, yet no one has lifted a finger. These actions, which run counter to international law and legitimacy, have worsened the Palestinian people's suffering and have directly caused an escalation of violence, all as a result of continued occupation.

Given this obviously deteriorating situation, the international community continues to bear its historic responsibility. My delegation is waiting for the international community to shoulder its responsibility, as it did when it uprooted the apartheid regime in South Africa. We call on the international community to force Israel to respect international legitimacy and all decisions and resolutions related to the Palestinian cause, in keeping with the relevant resolutions adopted by the League of Arab States — the most recent of which related to the Arab Peace Initiative — as well as the principle of land for peace and the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Any current initiatives that do not take those requirements into account will not succeed. Moreover,

any initiative that does not put an end to Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanese territories will not be sustainable and thus will not succeed.

My delegation reaffirms its support for all efforts by members of the international community that will lead to a just solution aimed at the establishment of a Palestinian State and a life of freedom, rights and dignity for the Palestinian people.

Mr. Alateef (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to express my delegation's thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its efforts in fulfilling its responsibility to help the Palestinian people regain their usurped rights.

The fact that the question of Palestine has remained on the agenda of the General Assembly for more than 50 years clearly indicates the international community's failure to shoulder its responsibility towards the Palestinian people, to bring about peace and security in the Middle East, or to ensure the implementation of the provisions of international law.

For many decades the Palestinian people have been undergoing a genuine tragedy: their land has been usurped and half of them have been dispersed in a worldwide diaspora. Those left in Palestine have been subjected to brutal and bloody Israeli aggression that methodically violates international humanitarian law. Homes have been confiscated and demolished, people have been displaced, besieged and prevented access to food and medicine, innocent civilians have been killed, an apartheid wall has been constructed, agricultural lands have been burnt, and international laws, instruments, resolutions and decisions have been ignored.

Those actions clearly reflect the true — and evil — intention to establish a racist Jewish state on the land of Palestine. The injustice faced by the Palestinian people and the inability of the United Nations to protect them and to help them regain their rights, including the right to return, the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent State on all their territory, prevent the achievement of peace and security in the region.

It is high time that the question of Palestine was addressed seriously, averting any attempt to impose fait accompli policies on the Palestinian people and deprive them of their legitimate rights. Libya has declared, and reaffirms again today, that the only solution leading to peace, security and stability in the region is one that safeguards the return of all Palestinian refugees to their land and the establishment of a democratic State on the historic land of Palestine, in which Arabs and Jews live with equal rights and duties — similar to the situation in South Africa where blacks and whites now coexist after decades of conflict, hatred and bloodletting.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East conflict. One consequence undoubtedly is the occupation of the Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanon and the aggression against it. It is high time that Member States concentrated their efforts on implementing United Nations resolutions on the Golan and unconditionally restored it to Syria. The Israeli occupying forces must be made to withdraw from the Sheba'a farmlands and to restore that area to Lebanon, and must be made to compensate both Syria and Lebanon for damage caused by the occupation.

The tragedy of the brotherly Iraqi people living under occupation has resulted in hundreds of thousands of people killed, hundreds of thousands injured and millions displaced or forced to become refugees. An urgent United Nations initiative is needed to solve the crisis. This would require the withdrawal of the occupying force, an end to the bloodletting, the restoration of Iraq's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity, and action enabling Iraqis to control their resources and capacities and to freely determine their own fate. Such a solution would also require the participation of all citizens in administering the country — without marginalizing any sector or faction — in order to bring peace, security and prosperity to Iraq.

Mr. Sow (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): A detailed consideration of agenda item 18 could not be held under more meaningful auspices than during this week, which is particularly symbolic since it coincides with the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People as well as the fortieth anniversary of the adoption, on 22 November 1967, of Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which laid the legal and political basis for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict and bringing about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In that context, the convening of the Annapolis Peace Conference on the laudable initiative of His

Excellency Mr. George Bush, President of the United States of America, is for my country, the Republic of Guinea, both a source of encouragement and a reason to hope for a revival of the negotiation process, which should promote the establishment of a sovereign, independent and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel.

My delegation welcomes the courageous efforts towards peace made by the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Ehud Olmert, and we call upon both parties to do everything possible to achieve a comprehensive agreement to establish the conditions for a lasting peace in accordance with the Annapolis road map.

We are convinced that the Palestinian and Israeli leaders can achieve that if they act in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular its resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and the Quartet road map of 2003. As Mr. Ban Ki-moon, our Secretary-General clearly emphasized,

> "The basis for a solution is clear: an end to the occupation that began in 1967, the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State, alongside a secure and fully recognized State of Israel, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, as called for in the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council" (*Press release SG/SM/10926*).

In the light of these guidelines for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, my delegation believes that the international community should renew and consolidate its efforts in order, first, to put an end once and for all to Israeli occupation by ensuring the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem; secondly, to put a stop to the colonization campaign waged by Israel, including the building of a separation wall in violation of international law and the provisions of the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice; thirdly, to define the status of and preserve the sacred nature of the Islamic and Christian holy places in Al-Quds Al-Sharif; fourthly, to encourage the resumption of an inter-Palestinian dialogue to facilitate the restoration of Palestinian national unity and the reconstruction, restructuring and reform of Palestinian institutions; and fifthly, to deal fairly with the problem of Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

In other words, everything possible should be done to end the deterioration of the situation and to revive the peace process on a dynamic and credible basis.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its excellent report and, particularly, for the profound commitment evinced by its Chairman, our brother, Ambassador Paul Badji, the Permanent Representative of Senegal.

We appeal to the international community to provide the necessary assistance and support to the Committee and to the Division for Palestinian Rights so that they can effectively implement the mandate given them by the General Assembly and to mobilize international support in order to promote the effective exercise of inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Ms. Rodríguez de Ortiz (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Our delegation aligns itself with what was said by the representative of the Republic of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

On the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to reiterate its support for the Palestinian cause and its desire to contribute to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. We also support the noble task of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and we commend it on the activities it completed under its work programme during the year 2007.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is fully convinced that strict adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, in particular, respect for the sovereignty of States, the self-determination of peoples, non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of States, and the prohibition of the use of force against the territorial integrity or the political independence of any State, are fundamental to the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as peaceful coexistence among States.

Sovereignty resides exclusively in peoples and the fate of the great Palestinian people can only be determined by the Palestinians themselves. It is indispensable that the Palestinians be given full control of their territory. There can be no peace, security and stability while a foreign occupation is under way. Quite on the contrary, that will always provoke rejection by the people. This year, there have been four decades of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, and we reiterate the urgent appeal to Israel for it to withdraw from occupied Palestinian territory.

Venezuela supports the formula of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within internationally recognized secure borders, and we support all international initiatives designed to bring about an agreement that will achieve a peaceful, just and genuine solution to the Palestinian question, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Venezuela is concerned that the Government of the State of Israel continues to build the separation wall in the face of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. We reject the constant lockdown in the Gaza Strip, Israeli incursions into Palestinian centres of population and the system of checkpoints that control the entire West Bank and that have produced such extremely deplorable effects in the lives of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela considers that only a negotiated solution can achieve the objective of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Such a solution must be based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and it must guarantee, in particular, the effective self-determination of the Palestinian people and the right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and retrieve the property from which they were displaced and uprooted.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): Viewed in the context of far too many years — almost a decade — without any process but with mounting bloodshed, destruction and misery, the talks that have just concluded in Annapolis assume enormous proportions. Sixty years have elapsed since the formation of the State of Israel and 40 years have elapsed since its occupation of the Palestinian territories and other Arab lands. More to the point, however, is that it has been over 15 years since the last international conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict, that of Madrid in 1991, and seven since the last face-to-face meeting between Israel and the Palestinians. During the intervening periods, the tension, suffering, dislocation, death and destruction have continued, borne almost entirely by civilians. In the absence, therefore, of any credible face-to-face negotiations, tensions and confusion have only escalated further and further, the logic of force taking precedence over the power of reason.

For this reason, we applaud President George Bush and Secretary Rice for using their considerable weight with the two parties to bring them together to launch serious discussions at Annapolis. The result has been an agreement to begin negotiations forthwith on 12 December of this year, with a commitment to reaching a two-State solution to the problem in 2008. As has been eloquently expressed by many speakers in this forum, such a solution means Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders. Praise must also be extended to President Abbas of Palestine and Prime Minister Olmert of Israel for their mettle and fortitude in undertaking the discussions at Annapolis, which have led to the Joint Understanding on the way forward. We see no reason, after 60 years of hostilities compounded by the harsh occupation of the last 40 years, why this high level of commitment should not, this time, result in a settlement in 2008, particularly with the stated firm involvement of the President of the United States and his commitment to peace in Palestine and throughout the whole Middle East.

This development could hardly have come at a better time. The living conditions of the Palestinian people have become intolerably miserable. Most importantly, poverty rates remain unacceptably high. Seventy per cent of households in Gaza, 56 per cent in the West Bank and 19 per cent in East Jerusalem live below the poverty line. The educational sector has been under increasing pressure, since Israel halted aid to the Palestinian Authority. In addition, Israel's infamous wall and other restrictions have severely impaired teacher and student access to schools and universities. The total available water supply has decreased over 10 per cent this year compared to last year in the West Bank, and decreases of over 40 per cent have occurred in Gaza. Less than half the households are connected to wastewater networks, while only 4.5 per cent of Gaza households consider their water of good quality.

We must look also at the fact that there are some 10,400 Palestinians held in some 30 Israeli jails, detention facilities and camps. Of those, 118 are women, 376 are children under 18, 183 have died and 1,000 have suffered serious illnesses. Almost two thirds of Gaza's population were refugees last year, and were desperately dependent on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). One million depended on it for health care, and a further 195,000 are enrolled in its schools.

Much of this picture of desperation in Palestine is due, of course, to Israel's decision to have no contact with a major segment of the Palestinian people and to withhold taxes and tariffs owed to the Palestinian Authority and used to finance its obligations. Direct international financial aid was also halted. Finally, there is the infamous wall, only 20 per cent of which corresponds to the Green Line, while some 154,320 acres of the West Bank, or 10.7 per cent of its land area, are trapped between the wall and the Green Line — 141,974 acres of that, or almost 92 per cent, in the Jerusalem area.

Most of these facts and statistics, it should be noted, come from the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of Palestinian People (A/62/35). This insightful report goes on to highlight the Committee's extreme concern with regard to Israel's military excursions into Gaza; its military operations in the West Bank; its extrajudicial killings; the destruction of Palestinian homes, civilian infrastructure and agricultural land; the large number of deaths and injuries; and the excessive and indiscriminate use of force. We remember all too well the attack and invasion of Lebanon with its objective of overkill and destruction, particularly the indiscriminate dropping of huge numbers of cluster bombs on civilian areas.

The report also makes note of the substantial illegal Israeli settlement activity and the construction of the wall, separating Palestinians from Jews while confiscating Arab farm and residential land, or at least significantly reducing its practical value. The wall was and is being constructed in contravention of the three-year-old Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. We must also recognize the continual closure of Gaza borders, which Israel deems a hostile territory, while it applies additional sanctions. Finally, it must be noted that the report justifiably condemns all attacks against Israeli citizens by Palestinians.

Along these lines, it is critical to note that just months after the Six-Day War the legal counsel of Israel's Foreign Ministry was asked whether international law permitted settlement in the newly conquered land. The Ministry's counsel replied in no uncertain terms that it was his conclusion that civilian settlement in the administered territories contravened the explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel, by the way, is a signatory of the Convention, which forbids an occupying Power from moving part of its population into occupied territory. The counsel also rejected the Ministry's argument that the West Bank was not normal occupied territory because the land status was uncertain.

It is crucial to grasp, in this litany of condemnation of Israeli policy and actions against Palestinians and other Arab nations, the effect that this all has in the greater Muslim world. Unfortunately, this effect extends beyond Israel and encompasses portions of the West. For this reason we agree with the report's statement that there must be greater recognition that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the major underlying factors in the current rift between Western and Islamic societies.

Without a concerted effort to resolve the issue and eliminate this international flashpoint, the situation will only fester while continuing to involve other outside players. Virtually any tense spot or conflict in the Middle East can trace its roots back to Palestine and the actions of the Israelis. The situation has not been improving, which makes it imperative that no effort should be spared to bring the conflict to an end. That is why we take the Annapolis Conference very seriously for its commitment to negotiations leading to a 2008 settlement, promising independence and dignity for the Palestinians and recognition and durable security for Israel.

This settlement must be based upon recognized international standards, such as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2003) and 1515 (2003) in particular, as well as other related resolutions. Account should also be taken of the efforts and suggestions of other bodies, such as the Quartet and its road map, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States in Beirut in

March 2002 and the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings, which call for immediate implementation.

It should be borne in mind that Israel has technically withdrawn from Gaza and parts of the Northern West Bank and dismantled of some illegal Jewish settlements there. These steps are in line with measures called for in the implementation of the Quartet's road map, but obviously much more must be done. For example, the return of the Golan Heights, which Jewish farmers pressured Israeli forces to take by their provocations during the Six-Day War, must be undertaken as part of the settlement process.

The usefulness of the Conference at Annapolis relative to the peace process will be judged by what happens in 2008. How much political capital will be expended when the core impasse issues are confronted again, the so-called final status issues: the recognized and accepted borders, the Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and the return of the Palestinian refugees to their rightful places. Annapolis therefore demonstrates that Israel is prepared to negotiate in good faith with the Palestinians. If so, 2008 will be a pivotal year, one in which prospects for a peaceful future for mankind would improve significantly. Let us hope that will be the case!

Mr. McNee (Canada): Canada is strongly committed to a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. Canada maintains its longstanding support for a two-State solution; one that recognizes Israel's right to live within secure borders and which also includes the establishment of a democratic, independent and viable Palestinian State.

This week in Annapolis, the Israelis and Palestinians agreed in a Joint Understanding to work towards a peace agreement by the end of 2008. This historic development came about through the determination, vision and efforts of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, under the leadership of the United States.

The progress achieved during that Conference brings renewed hope. Canada is especially encouraged by the robust presence and support of the international community at Annapolis, notably from the Arab world, whose renewed commitment is vital for a comprehensive peace agreement. We urge Arab States to continue to support these efforts, including through the Arab Peace Initiative and by constructively engaging in the peace process.

Canada fully supports the process launched at Annapolis; we are prepared to do all we can to help the parties. We also welcome the international community's commitment to helping the Palestinians. For our part, Canada will be working with the Palestinians on a programme of assistance to address areas of governance, security and prosperity.

Canada also supports initiatives towards creating the necessary conditions for peace. In this regard, Canada believes that the Israeli decision to freeze the expansion of settlements is vital.

(*spoke in French*)

The cessation of all forms of violence is a primary precursor to any form of lasting peace. That means ending the campaign of rocket attacks and the return of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit to his family in Israel. Similarly, while we recognize Israel's security concerns and its right to defend itself, its actions must be measured. Israel must exercise the utmost restraint and meet its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law.

All parties have a responsibility to avoid civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. Canada urges the United Nations and its Member States to play a more constructive role in supporting peace. While Canada recognizes the indispensable role of United Nations agencies in delivering humanitarian and development assistance to the region, Canada strongly believes that resolutions adopted by the General Assembly should complement these efforts. Canada remains concerned by the disproportionate focus placed by this Assembly on the situation in the Middle East, in particular by the number of resolutions that single out Israel. Rather, these resolutions should contribute to setting the parties on a path towards a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

In conclusion, because of renewed optimism in the region and the decisive step that has been taken, Canada believes that the international community, including all United Nations bodies, must focus the efforts to help the parties achieve sustainable peace.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): On a daily basis, Palestinians in the occupied territories continue to face an Israeli policy that violates the basic principles of international humanitarian law and international human

rights law. The reality is that Palestinians continue to live under an occupation that they have endured for decades. They face daily hardships compounded by hundreds of checkpoints that restrict their movement and access. Violent incursions by the Israeli army into Palestinian areas continue unabated, while Israeli settlements and the separation wall expand in spite of international condemnation. These actions undermine positive movements towards peace.

We believe that the only way to bring about peace in the Middle East is to have a comprehensive and unconditional negotiated settlement to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan Heights. This will contribute towards peace and security throughout the Middle East region and will have a positive effect on global peace and security.

South Africa welcomes the holding of the Annapolis Conference, which for the first time brought together many countries keen on supporting the peace process in the Middle East. We also welcome the Joint Understanding reached by the parties. We commend the efforts undertaken by the parties, Palestine and Israel, which bear the primary responsibility for achieving peace. The international community has the duty to assist and support the parties as they work to reach a settlement, and also to ensure that political progress is coupled with a change for the better in the lives of Palestinians and Israelis. In that regard, we commend previous regional and international efforts to move the peace process forward, including the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

Experience has shown that successful conflict resolution has as its basis the willingness of the parties to negotiate without preconditions. To encourage the parties, we can refer to South Africa's own historical experience of negotiating an end to the conflict in our country that, at times, seemed unsolvable. This encourages us to believe that such a settlement is possible in the Middle East. Despite the violence and despair that threatens peaceful change in conflict situations, our belief is that the only alternative is an inclusive negotiated solution.

It is for this reason that we support the launch by the Annapolis Conference of a process of negotiation to solve all issues, including final status issues, leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State. We wish to reiterate our view that the way forward must include the establishment of an independent, economically viable State of Palestine existing side by side, in peace, with Israel, with both States enjoying secure and internationally recognized borders. This vision of a two-State solution has already been enshrined in various United Nations resolutions.

We also realize the need to underpin the political undertakings of Annapolis by ensuring capacity-building and financial support for Palestine by the international community. We therefore commend the Republic of France for its willingness to host a donors conference later this year. We also reiterate the position of the South African Minister for Foreign Affairs that South Africa intends to work with our partners within the India, Brazil and South Africa framework to assist with sustainable economic development and capacity-building in Palestine.

These efforts must, however, be undertaken in a serious and genuine manner in order to result in concrete and meaningful steps forward. Otherwise, we are afraid we will see a repetition of a failed process and Palestinian suffering will grow worse. We also take note of the words of Prime Minister Olmert during the Annapolis Conference when he said that "I am convinced that the reality that emerged in our region in 1967 will change significantly". South Africa trusts that this changing reality that the Prime Minister is referring to will reflect the wishes of the international community as expressed by United Nations resolutions.

In the end, there must be and will be peace between Israel and Palestine. There must be and will be peace between Israel and the Arab world. The violent days that have seen the deaths of so many Palestinians and Israelis must end and end soon.

Mr. Maema (Lesotho): My delegation wishes to congratulate the President for the able leadership and skill he has shown in presiding over the Assembly at its sixty-second session.

The delegation of Lesotho wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report entitled, "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", contained in document A/62/344. Our congratulations also go to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its report (A/62/35), which contains valuable recommendations regarding the solution of the question of Palestine. In particular, my delegation wishes to thank the Committee's Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, and its

Rapporteur, His Excellency Mr. Victor Camilleri of Malta, for their enlightening remarks.

Lesotho aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. The year 2007 marks 40 years of occupation of the Palestinian territory. It marks four decades of repression of the Palestinian people, as well as the suppression of their rights, including their right to self-determination. Moreover, it marks an unacceptably long period in which the international community has failed to bring an end to the plight of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory.

My delegation is indeed disheartened that, once again, reports have been presented to this Assembly of the escalating Israeli violence and disproportionate use of force against the Palestinian people, which has often resulted in the loss of life and extensive destruction of property. We wish to reiterate our deep concern that the struggle by the Palestinian people for self-determination, national independence and sovereignty is ongoing and the cost in terms of human lives continues to escalate. In our view, the time has come for members of the international community to unequivocally denounce the atrocities and violations of human rights that the Palestinian people, particularly the civilian population, have had to endure for decades.

Lesotho firmly believes that all parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must adhere to the principles of international law. In this regard, we wish to reiterate a view already expressed by several previous speakers that a just, comprehensive and long-lasting settlement to the conflict can only be achieved through the observance of international law and by implementing, among others, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and other relevant United Nations resolutions. At this juncture, I would like to underline that it is the view of my delegation that the lack of respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as the failure to implement the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, are driving forces behind the continuing high levels of violence that severely affects unarmed civilians, particularly women and children, in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In recent years, the humanitarian, economic, social, political and security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has deteriorated even further. My delegation wishes to reiterate its appeal to the international donors that suspended assistance programmes to the Palestinian people to consider adopting measures that would not further increase the tension and/or have a punitive effect on the entire Palestinian population. The grave humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory should not be allowed to deteriorate any further.

Lesotho is hopeful that the recently concluded Annapolis Conference will achieve its desired results. We are convinced that it is only through a negotiated solution that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine can be attained. Lesotho views the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as the cornerstone for bringing the question of Palestine to a final, true and sustainable peaceful settlement.

May the vision of a Palestinian State based on the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in secure borders, be realized, at last.

Mr. Maksom (Malaysia): First of all, Sir, let me associate myself with the statements made by Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

We continue to discuss the question of Palestine again and again for the simple reason that we have not arrived at a just solution to the problem. Throughout the time we continue to discuss this issue, the plight of the Palestinian people shows no hope of improving. In fact, for the last 40 years since the occupation, the Palestinian people continue to live under constant harassment and in dire hardship, fearful for their lives, their property, livelihood and more so, their future. They have suffered countless human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, excessive and indiscriminate use of force, incarceration and the destruction of homes, infrastructure and agricultural lands. The actions of impunity by the occupying Power continue unabated, in disregard of their obligations under international law, conventions and human rights norms, and in spite of condemnation by the international community, including this body.

The opportunities for peace and a just solution to this question have been there, but the hopes to achieve it have been dashed every time. On many occasions,

the blame and the burden was laid on the Palestinians to make more concessions towards the achievement of peace. Surely the international community cannot expect this people, who has suffered 40 years of subjugation and occupation, to offer concessions, when to begin with there are almost none to give.

The failure to arrive at a just solution to this problem has directly and indirectly affected regional, as well as global, peace and has left adverse, far-reaching consequences. It has thwarted the prospect of achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It has hardened feelings and fired up the passions of large groups of people around the globe, particularly in the Muslim world, against the West, which comes in response to the seemingly blind eye turned by certain Western countries to the excesses of the Israeli occupation regime.

It is imperative that a lasting and durable solution to this problem be found on the basis of justice and humanity. We already have with us the necessary tools to achieve this objective, including various General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, in particular 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

But these tools will remain nothing more than tools if we lack the most important component required to reach an effective, permanent solution to the conflict. What is required is the sincere, strong and committed political will by all parties concerned. Without a political solution, nothing can be achieved. A just and comprehensive solution, including the two-State solution, is feasible and achievable, provided the two parties concerned continue to be focused, committed and determined to resolve all the core and fundamental issues.

While efforts are under way to find a just solution to this conflict, we urge all concerned parties to cease any actions that could jeopardize this effort, including attacks on the civilian population, either military or economic. The Israeli occupying Power must comply with its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and international law and must immediately cease any actions that violate the human dignity and economic livelihood of the Palestinian people, as well as any that alter the demography of the land through the establishment of settlements and the construction of the illegal separation wall. The Assembly's session today must send a clear message that we condemn these actions, since they are immoral, inhuman, intolerable and illegal; they constitute unambiguous and serious violations of international law and United Nations resolutions, including those adopted by the Security Council. As the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations, the Assembly must see to it that it takes up a stronger role in efforts to stop the occupation.

Yesterday we observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This year marks 40 years of Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, the longest in history. These events only serve to remind us of our collective failure with respect to the Palestinian people. We owe it to them to see to it that this year is the last time we observe such events. We welcome the convening of the recent Annapolis Conference; we view it as paving the way for the attainment of a just and lasting solution to the conflict. Following the Annapolis Conference, we look forward with high hopes to an eventual just and comprehensive solution to the Palestine question, including the realization of a two-State solution, of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Sir, allow me first of all to associate myself with the statement made by the Ambassador of Cuba, His Excellency Mr. Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

At the same time, I want to express my delegation's support for the work carried out during this session by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I thank the Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal, for the report he introduced yesterday on the sensitive situation in Palestine and on the work of the Committee (A/62/35).

Nicaragua considers that the continuation of the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory is the root cause of the Palestinian and Middle East conflicts. That is why my Government and my people support international efforts towards a settlement of this situation and a solid, lasting peace in the region, with the creation of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State.

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was

marked yesterday, 29 November 2007, the President of the Republic of Nicaragua, Commander Daniel Ortega Saavedra, sent a message of solidarity to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People stating clearly the position of Nicaragua as regards the question of Palestine. The message reads as follows:

> "The Government of National Reconciliation and Unity of Nicaragua reaffirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its authorities in their just struggle to establish a sovereign and independent Palestinian State. The Palestinian people has for decades endured the Israeli occupation of its territories, and its greatest aspiration is to redeem its legitimate ancestral rights to retrieve its occupied lands and establish a free, independent and viable State.
>
> "The situation in Palestine has been deteriorating year after year as a result of the continuation of Israel's illegal practices, including continued violations of the right to life and personal security of Palestinians through the indiscriminate use of force, in violation of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights standards, which have, in turn, led to an extremely difficult economic, social and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.
>
> "The situation worsened further once the illegal construction of the wall to separate and dismember the Palestinian territory began. It isolates municipalities and separates them from East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, which has a devastating impact, materially, economically and socially. It is worrying that Israel is announcing further restrictions, such as cutting back the essential provision of energy and fuel, which is a collective violation of the rights of the civilian population and violates of the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
>
> "It is important to take measures to build the confidence necessary to drive negotiations between the parties that will make it possible to move towards the irreversible achievement of a just peace, based on the existence of two States.
>
> "We believe that the problem of Palestine is at the core of the problems in the Middle East. My Government advocates a politically just solution to the problem of Palestine, in the light of the various resolutions adopted by the United Nations and consistent with the principle of land for peace, established at the Madrid Conference and in the Arab Peace Initiative.
>
> "The Government and the people of Nicaragua support the just cause of the Palestinian people as a matter of principle. Along with the rest of the international community, we consider it necessary to intensify international efforts to find a peaceful solution that will lead to the creation of the Palestinian State, which is the only way to bring about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East."

Mr. Khammanichanh (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Let me begin by thanking the President for convening these important meetings on agenda item 18, "Question of Palestine". I am sure that under his able leadership the meetings will be crowned with success. We also thank the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their comprehensive reports presented under this agenda item (A/62/344 and A/62/35). My delegation also associates itself with the statement made on this question by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This year's celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It also marked six decades of the arduous and unyielding struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, namely the right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and the right of return for Palestine refugees. The occasion reminds us that the road to peace in this region is anything but easy and that peace cannot be achieved by force. Lasting peace will not exist unless statehood for the Palestinians is realized and security for the Israelis is guaranteed. Therefore, all efforts aimed at putting an end to the occupation and bringing about a comprehensive, just and permanent solution to the question of Palestine should be encouraged and supported by the international community.

The lingering violence in the region and the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people remain

a source of grave concern to the international community. As reflected in the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35), the critical situation on the ground is beyond an economic and political siege. The Palestinian people have endured constant misery and oppression. The de facto sanctions imposed for the past nearly two years have affected every aspect of Palestinian life, entailing an ever-increasing pervasive malnutrition. The restrictions on Gaza have had a particularly severe socio-economic and humanitarian impact, having inflicted further suffering on the local population. All of this makes these people heavily dependent on aid. The extension of Israeli settlements, the construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory and the setting up of checkpoints throughout the West Bank have not only denied the people free movement to attend to their basic needs, but have also triggered an upsurge in violence in the area. This situation requires an immediate remedy.

The occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sustainable peace and stability in the region will remain elusive as long as the national rights of the Palestinian people are not ensured. In this context, the Lao People's Democratic Republic reiterates its firm support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in the pursuit of their legitimate cause in the struggle for their inalienable rights. We stress the necessity of achieving a just solution to their cause, based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Not only has the six-decade-long conflict prevented the Palestinian people from enjoying their inalienable rights, but it also continues to threaten regional and international peace and security. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community to redouble its efforts to ensure the expeditious and full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The President returned to the Chair.

It is only through such efforts that a negotiated two-State solution can be achieved, bringing about an end to the occupation and leading to the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its neighbours.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 18.

I would like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/62/L.18 to A/62/L.21 will be taken at a later date to be announced.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 18.

Organization of work

I should like to consult members regarding an extension of the work of the Second Committee. Members will recall that, at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 21 September 2007, the General Assembly approved the recommendation of the General Committee that the Second Committee complete its work by Friday, 30 November 2007. However, the President has just been informed by the Chairperson of the Second Committee that the Committee will not be able to complete its work today, 30 November, and will need to hold additional meetings until Friday, 7 December 2007.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to extend the work of the Second Committee until Friday, 7 December 2007? I see no objection.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.